



BEAUTIFUL BEINGS

by Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson





LOGLINE

When a teenage boy adopts a bullied misfit into his gang of outsiders, he begins to experience a series of dreamlike visions.

SYNOPSIS

Addi, a boy raised by a clairvoyant mother, decides to adopt a bullied misfit into his gang of outsiders. Left to their own devices, the boys explore aggression and violence but also learn about loyalty and love. As their behavior escalates towards life-threatening situations, Addi begins to experience a series of dreamlike visions. Can his newfound intuition guide him and his friends back to a safer path, or will they dive irrevocably into further violence?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



As I was exploring stories to write for my second feature film, certain dreams haunted me and did not stop until I started writing this story.

Me and my childhood friends come from normal working-class families. At the same time our world felt unique. The sarcastic humor, violent behavior, and parents who didn't really seem to have their own lives together. On top of that, in my family, the belief in meaningful dreams and supernatural senses.

Beautiful Beings brings these elements together. It is a story about friendship that is full of youthful energy, hope and confused feelings. About a group of boys that feel somewhat unwelcome but find support in one another.

Beautiful Beings brings up the questions: What is true friendship? Can boys who seem like bad influences still be good friends? And finally, how do you find your own path? What is the importance of listening to one's intuition?

As a filmmaker my hope is to give the audience an authentic sensation of being a teenager. We should experience the boys' world like we are there with them. I love the visual and poetic aspects of film and I am a strong believer in the importance of the stories we tell. I went into filmmaking because I aspired to move people and enrich their senses, like many great films have done for me. I hope that *Beautiful Beings* also does that for some, with a story about friendship, the importance of role models, self-acceptance and intuition.



INTERVIEW WITH GUÐMUNDUR ARNAR GUÐMUNDSSON

by Marta Bałaga

As proven by your first feature, *Heartstone*, you are not afraid of working with very young actors. Why do you find it interesting?

I have always been interested in stories about kids and young adults, also when I started out making my short films including award-winning *Whale Valley*. My protagonists have always been young, they are kids or teenagers. I think it's mainly because I had a very active and turbulent childhood myself.

At that time, you are basically in your own world – adults just can't access it. They can look inside but they never see the full picture and, as a kid, you look from the outside into the world of the adults. You are in between these two very different realities, which is something I was very aware of. Grown-ups had very little understanding of what was going on in our lives. They would say: "You're still a kid; it's not so serious." But to us, it was. Something draws me back to that time when I am writing, to the way I was thinking and speaking back then. It's a lot of fun, actually. Later, during the shoot, I have to remind myself to stick to that point of view, to keep on seeing things like a teenager would. It's such an important moment in your life – that's when you are experiencing all these big emotions, often for the very first time. You are learning to face life, both the good and the bad.

How do you work with them once the shooting begins?

When I was making *Heartstone*, one of the boys approached the role like a method actor. He just became that person. It was a little bit scary, seeing that. We had to help him be himself again, so this time, I was really paying attention. I made sure they weren't behaving like their characters when we weren't shooting, that they weren't playing cruel jokes on each other. We needed to keep these things separate.

When we first meet, kids always put on a show. They talk like they *think* you want them to talk. I want to encourage my actors to be themselves. I allow them to be teenagers, also in front of the camera. It's an interesting experience because at the same time, you need to act like a principal and be able to say: "Hey, behave. Stop that."

There is improvisation in the movement but not so much when it comes to the written word – it's all in the script and every scene has its purpose. They had this freedom deciding how to react and use their bodies, move and have fun with the scene. This way, they could always do something new and surprise each other.

At that age, you are so vulnerable. And yet some of the characters here are very complex, including a bullied boy, struggling at school and at home.

We talked a lot about this character, me and the boy [Áskell Einar Pálmason]. In real life, he is actually quite talkative. He was worried at first, afraid of what people are going to think. "Everyone will say I am like that too" – he would say. Then we talked about kids like that, their situation and he realized the importance of this role.

When I am casting kids, it's important to find the ones with good inner balance. Acting in a film like this one is such an extreme experience, there is so much pressure that comes with it and it just takes up all your energy. You need to be able to handle it and having a good support system is crucial.





How do you approach the scenes of sexual nature, especially given their age?

I was happy because we worked with an intimacy coordinator. Thanks to her technique, the actors don't feel exposed and I think it's brilliant. It's a new thing but it feels like it should have always been there.

You approach these scenes like a choreographed dance. You go through it all, movement by movement, with actors explaining what they will do and what their reaction will be very mechanically. You talk about it, making sure nobody feels uncomfortable. There is no element of surprise. By the time you are actually shooting, they already know every step. And they are not forced to repeat the scene over and over again, which in itself can also be quite traumatic.



There is always a bit of cruelty in your stories: pain, disappointment. And the adults either seem completely indifferent to it or they aren't able to help.

I just try to keep it true to how I experienced things. At the same time, I also experienced a lot of beauty and humor, and they are also featured in my films.

It's important to point out that when you see these young boys or men, being aggressive or exhibiting the signs of "toxic masculinity", you have to recognize there is a reason for their behavior. They are not born this way. They just had to deal with some issues they shouldn't have to deal with and now they are acting out. When I was a young man, I was still afraid of running into those groups of 16-year-old boys. I remembered how we used to be at that age, how dangerous.



There is a supernatural element to *Beautiful Beings*, which is quite surprising. How did you want to introduce it?

In Iceland, it's a part of our culture. We talk about dreams, especially with people closest to us, and many believe in fortune-telling. It's considered to be normal. If you start talking about it with your friend, he or she will always know someone who can read coffee grounds, for example. It's not considered as something "New Age" or hippie – you have CEOs of big companies doing the exact same thing, they are just keeping it more private.

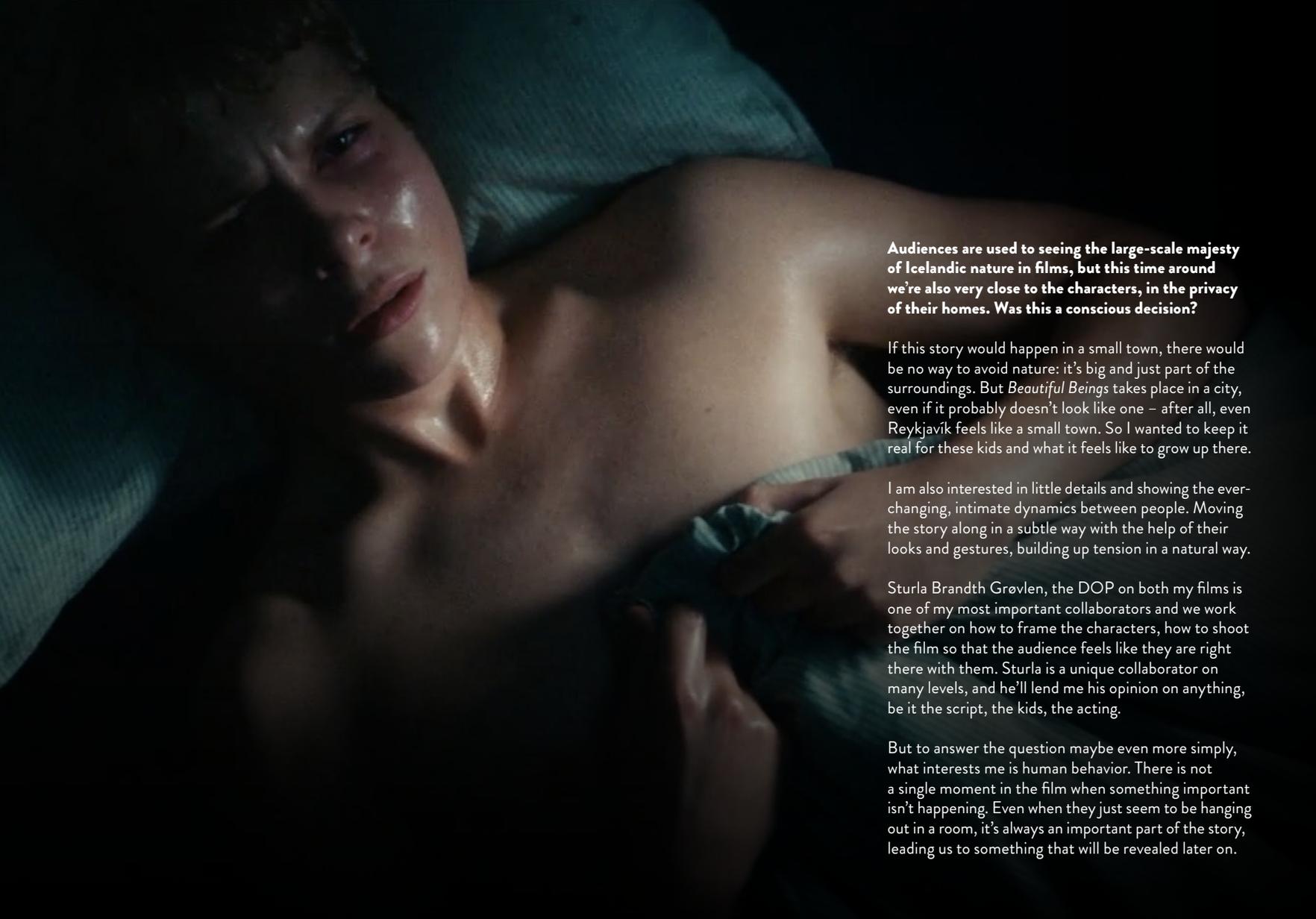
I remember my parents were very much into it. They really believed in those things. As a teenager, I thought it was crazy. I came back to it only later, I started to pay attention to my dreams and listen to my intuition. Now, it's a part of my life, too. Thanks to my dreams, I know things I wouldn't have known otherwise.

For me, it was all about making it subtle enough. Subtle enough not to take over the whole story but still be an important element in the protagonists' lives. It was all about finding this balance. You see it in films sometimes, like in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Biutiful*. For me, seeing how he approached it was just amazing – it was something I could really relate to. It was done in this very ordinary, natural way. Also, I have always been a fan of *The Sopranos* and when I look at this series now, I notice that he is often dreaming about things that are about to happen. The guy who wrote that, he must have experienced it himself. These things happen, more often than not – we just don't like to talk about it because it's considered weird. But it happens in every family – at least that's my theory.



Do you think you will want to continue exploring childhood and teenage life later on? Or you might be done after this film?

There are still stories I would like to tell. I just like stories about kids or young adults so much – I don't really know why. Maybe it will change when I grow older? What I do know, however, is that I would like to make a fairy tale next time around. With kids. I could just forget myself in them when I was younger and I really miss these kinds of films.



Audiences are used to seeing the large-scale majesty of Icelandic nature in films, but this time around we're also very close to the characters, in the privacy of their homes. Was this a conscious decision?

If this story would happen in a small town, there would be no way to avoid nature: it's big and just part of the surroundings. But *Beautiful Beings* takes place in a city, even if it probably doesn't look like one – after all, even Reykjavík feels like a small town. So I wanted to keep it real for these kids and what it feels like to grow up there.

I am also interested in little details and showing the ever-changing, intimate dynamics between people. Moving the story along in a subtle way with the help of their looks and gestures, building up tension in a natural way.

Sturla Brandth Grøvlen, the DOP on both my films is one of my most important collaborators and we work together on how to frame the characters, how to shoot the film so that the audience feels like they are right there with them. Sturla is a unique collaborator on many levels, and he'll lend me his opinion on anything, be it the script, the kids, the acting.

But to answer the question maybe even more simply, what interests me is human behavior. There is not a single moment in the film when something important isn't happening. Even when they just seem to be hanging out in a room, it's always an important part of the story, leading us to something that will be revealed later on.

WRITER / DIRECTOR

A close-up portrait of Gudmundur Arnar Gudmundsson. He has long, wavy, light brown hair and a full beard with some grey. He is wearing black-rimmed glasses and a light-colored, textured sweater. His hands are clasped together in front of his chin. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a dark, solid color.

GUDMUNDUR ARNAR GUDMUNDSSON

Gudmundur Arnar graduated in Fine Art and studied screenwriting. His short films and feature debut have been showcased and awarded in numerous festivals. Among these accolades are Cannes Film Festival, Venice Film Festival and a nomination for the European Film Awards. His debut feature *Heartstone* premiered in the Venice Days Competition in 2016 and ended up collecting over 50 awards worldwide.

FILMOGRAPHY

Beautiful Beings, 2022, feature
Heartstone, 2016, feature
Artun, 2014, short
Whale Valley, 2013, short

CAST



BIRGIR DAGUR BJARKASON – ADDI

Birgir Dagur was born in 2004 in Reykjavik, Iceland. He has been interested in acting from a young age and is making his debut in film with his role in *Beautiful Beings*. Birgir loves outdoor activities of all kinds and goes frequently to see his grandparents in the Westfjords where he can really reset himself and enjoy himself in a peaceful environment. His interests also involve Mixed Martial Arts where he trains with his friends. Today he is studying for his college diploma with acting as his major.



ÁSKELL EINAR PÁLMASSON – BALLI

Áskell Einar was born in Iceland in 2006. *Beautiful Beings* is his debut in acting. His main interest is basketball and music as he has trained with the Icelandic team, KR, for the last decade (since the age of 6). He is a keen music listener, and has a particular interest in modern hip-hop.

CAST



VIKTOR BENÓNY BENEDIKTSSON – KONNI

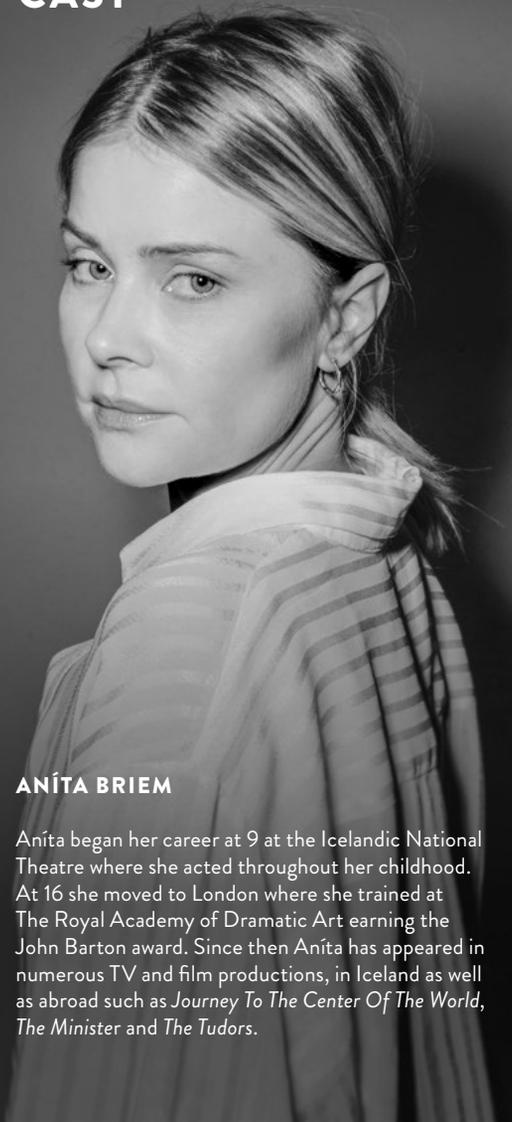
Viktor Benóný was born in Iceland in 2005. He has a great interest in acting and films. He made his debut in feature film as the second leading role in the Icelandic film, *The Falcons*. Viktor has been acting in several projects for the past few years and is currently in college with focus on drama and visual arts. His main interests are traveling, football, family and friends.



SNORRI RAFN FRÍMANSSON – SIGGI

Snorri Rafn was born and raised in Reykjavik, Iceland in 2006. His passions are acting, music and soccer as he is a goalie for the Icelandic team, Fram, and competes with them regularly. He enjoys playing the guitar and singing. *Beautiful Beings* is his first role in a feature film, but he aims to have it as the first role of many. He is really passionate about acting and aims at making it his future career.

CAST



ANÍTA BRIEM

Aníta began her career at 9 at the Icelandic National Theatre where she acted throughout her childhood. At 16 she moved to London where she trained at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art earning the John Barton award. Since then Aníta has appeared in numerous TV and film productions, in Iceland as well as abroad such as *Journey To The Center Of The World*, *The Minister* and *The Tudors*.



ÍSGERÐUR GUNNARSDÓTTIR

Ísgerður has lived and worked in Iceland for the most part since graduating from ArtsEd school of acting in London 2003. She has acted in a variety of formats, mostly television for the Icelandic National broadcast service (*Rúv*) as well as theatre and voice work, such as radio shows, cartoons and audiobooks. Her work includes a variety of films – most recently *Come to Harm* by Anton Kristensen and *Ásgeir* Sigurðsson.



ÓLAFUR DARRI ÓLAFSSON

Ólafur Darri Ólafsson has been one of Iceland's busiest actors since his graduation from The Icelandic Drama School in 1998. He is one of the founders of the Vesturport theatre company. Ólafur has worked in theatre, film and tv in his native country of Iceland as well as internationally. Recent films include turns in *The BFG* (dir. Steven Spielberg), *A Walk Among The Tombstones* (dir. Scott Frank), *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (dir. Ben Stiller) *Murder Mystery* (dir. Kyle Newacheck) and *Fantastic Beasts, The Crimes of Grindelwald* (dir. David Yates) to name a few. Television work includes starring turns in Icelandic tv series *Trapped* and *The Minister* as well as Amazon Prime's *The Widow*, AMC's *Nos4a2* and BBC's *The Tourist*. Ólafur Darri has received numerous nominations and awards for his work, including Best Actor at The Karlovy Vary Film Festival in 2013.



CINEMATOGRAPHER

STURLA BRANDTH GRØVLEN

Originally from Trondheim, Norway. Lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark. Graduated from Bergen Academy of the Arts in 2006 and The National Film School of Denmark in 2011.

Notably known for the single-take thriller *Victoria* from 2015 which he received the Silver Bear for artistic contribution at the 65th Berlinale. The same year he received the Silver Frog at Camerimage for *Rams*. In 2020 four feature films Sturla has worked on have been released – *Wendy* (Benh Zeitlin) and *Shirley* (Josephine Decker) premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, while Jóhann Jóhannsson's sci-fi *Last and First Men* premiered at the Berlin Film Festival. *Another Round* directed by Thomas Vinterberg, originally chosen for Cannes 2020, had its premiere at Tiff 2020. The film won 4 European Film Awards and an Academy Award® for Best Foreign Language Film at the 2021 Oscars.

The Innocents directed by Eskil Vogt premiered at Un Certain Regard in Cannes 2021 and *Beautiful Beings* by director Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson will premiere at Berlinale 2022. Currently in production is Gunnar Vikenes' epic war drama *War Sailor* and Thomas Vinterberg first TV mini series, *Families Like Ours*.



PRODUCTION COMPANIES

JOIN MOTION PICTURES

Join Motion Pictures (JMP) is an independent, boutique production company producing mainly director-driven feature films with high artistic quality and international appeal. The company was established in Reykjavík, Iceland in 2007 and is co-owned by producer Anton Máni Svansson and writer-director-producer Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson. JMP films have been awarded with over 160 prizes and had premieres at major festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Locarno, and Toronto.

MOTOR

Founded in January 2018, MOTOR is a newly established Danish production company led by the acclaimed writer and producer team Christian Torpe and Jesper Morthorst. MOTOR focuses on exclusive, high profile content and work both nationally and internationally with feature films and TV series.

HOBAB

HOBAB is an International Boutique production company based in Stockholm, Sweden with a track record of more than 40 features produced. Heads of the company are Peter Krupenin and Nima Yousefi. Their philosophy is to provide the film makers a trustful playground to crystalize their vision so their stories can reach a broad audience without losing its edge.



PRODUCTION COMPANIES

FILM I VÄST

Film i Väst is one of Europe's most successful co-producers and Scandinavia's preeminent film fund. Since 1992 they have co-produced more than 1.000 feature films, TV-dramas, shorts & documentaries. Over the years, Film i Väst co-productions have also been richly rewarded with nominations and prizes at the world's most prestigious events, including festivals such as Cannes and Berlin, and galas such as the European Film Awards, the Golden Globes and the Oscars.

BASTIDE FILMS

Bastide Films BV (2013) is the production company founded by Jeroen Beker, who was previously producer and co-owner of Motel Films, IDTV Film, Caviar and Submarine Film. Since 1995 Jeroen Beker has produced and co-produced over 90 feature and short films, with premieres at major festivals like Cannes, Berlin, Locarno and Toronto a.o.

NEGATIV

Founded in 1995, Negativ has become one of the most prominent production companies in the Czech Republic. Over the course of its existence, the company has produced more than 40 live action, documentary and animated features. Focusing on projects with the potential for international coproduction, Negativ has also built a long-term relationship with filmmakers Bohdan Sláma, Helena Třeščíková, Michaela Pavlátová and Marek Najbrt.

FESTIVALS

World Premiere: Berlinale Panorama 2022

FILM INFORMATION

Original Title: Berdreymi
English Title: Beautiful Beings
Genre: Drama
Countries: Iceland
Denmark
Sweden
The Netherlands
Czech Republic
Languages: Icelandic
Year: 2022
Duration: 123 min.
Picture: Color
Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1
Sound: 5.1
Available Format: DCP

CAST

Birgir Dagur Bjarkason – Addi
Áskell Einar Pálmason – Balli
Viktor Benóný Benediktsson – Konni
Snorri Rafn Frímansson – Soggi
Aníta Briem – Guðrún
Ísgerður Gunnarsdóttir – Hulda
Ólafur Darri Ólafsson – Svenni

CREW

Director: Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson
Screenplay: Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson
Cinematography: Sturla Brandth Grøvlen
Editing: Andri Steinn Guðjónsson & Anders Skov
Production Design: Hulda Helgadóttir
Costume Design: Helga Rós Hannam
Hair & Make-up Design: Kristín Júlía Kristjánsdóttir
Sound Design: Jan Schermer
Music: Kristian Eidnes Andersen
Production company: Join Motion Pictures®
Co-production companies: Motor
Hobab
Film I Väst
Bastide Films
Negativ
Producer: Anton Máni Svansson
Co-producers: Lise Orheim Stender
Jesper Morthorst
Nima Yousefi
Peter Possne
Caroline Ljungberg
Linda Van Der Herberg
Jeroen Beker
Pavel Strnad
Executive Producers: Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson
Birgitta Björnsdóttir
With the support of: Icelandic Film Centre
Eurimages
Danish Film Institute
Icelandic Ministry of Industries and Innovation
Nederlands Film Fund
Czech Film Fund
Swedish Film Institute
Nordisk Film & TV Fond
Netherlands Film Production Incentive

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